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April 9, 1956

Mr. William J. Caldwell
Director, Office of Public Reports
International Cooperation Administration
Washington, D. C.

Dear Bill:

An internal study in Washington by the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service, I am told, is going to result in a recommendation that the Saigon Bureau of FBIS be closed and its coverage transferred to other bureaus; notably Okinawa. As one of the clients of FBIS, I have been given the opportunity to comment.

Like the Embassy, which has already stated it would find closing of the Saigon Bureau of FBIS, "highly undesirable," this Mass Communications-Information Division of USOM would be seriously hampered by not receiving the valuable daily files of FBIS, Saigon. Files from elsewhere--even if they were identical in fidelity with what we receive now--presumably would arrive by mail, which means they would be several days later than at present. It is unlikely that any other station would provide the same valuable monitoring we are receiving now.

As you know, we are not a propaganda agency. We do provide some news for the Vietnamese to distribute and considerable training in how to distribute it by all media. We follow closely the reactions to this news: especially the unfriendly reactions to media as well as news. One reliable gauge of the Vietnamese Government's -- and our -- success is the size and source of the Commie squawk, naturally. Another valuable guide to many things we do is the length of time it takes the Commie high command to figure out what will be the basis of this squawk.

For example, we had an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease some months ago and the Bamboo Telegraph immediately attributed it to the buffalo USOM had imported from Thailand. We were on that one, though, and quickly distributed the news that no import-buffaloes were ill; that the outbreak was local and completely under control. We were very interested to note -- through FBIS -- that the Commies never did pick that one up -- not even to this day. So what the Commies don't broadcast or print, is sometimes more valuable to us than what they do. We were able to avoid the error of overdoing the buffalo alibi by the daily knowledge that the Commies hadn't touched our sensitive spot. I had three or four follow-up stories that never were needed. And now the subject is forgotten.

We need the FBIS-Saigon service and use it every day. If you can pass this word to FBIS Washington, I'd be obliged.

Sincerely,

R. W. Safford
Chief, Program Support Division
USOM/Saigon